IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1 - 20. Previously Canceled

21. (Currently amended): A method for obtaining an improved *Enterobacteriaceae* strain comprising,

a) obtaining a progenitor strain from the genera of *Pantoea*, *Enterobacter*, *Erwinia* or *Gluconobacter*, and

b) eliminating a cryptic plasmid from the progenitor strain to obtain an improved strain

said cryptic plasmid having a nucleic acid sequence of at least 90% sequence identity with SEQ ID NO:1 ~~or~~ and SEQ ID NO:2 and wherein the improved strain is able to grow at higher temperatures than the progenitor strain.

22. (Previously added): The method according to claim 21, wherein the progenitor strain is capable of producing 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate from a carbon source.

23. (Previously added): The method according to claim 21, wherein the progenitor strain is a recombinant strain that comprises a heterologous nucleic acid sequence encoding a 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate reductase and is capable of converting 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate to 2-keto-L-gluconic acid.

24. (Previously added): The method according to claim 21, wherein an open reading frame of the nucleic acid sequence of the cryptic plasmid encodes an amino acid sequence having the sequence of SEQ ID NO:3.

25. (Canceled):

26. (Currently amended): The method according to claim 21, wherein the cryptic plasmid has the nucleic acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO:1 ~~or~~ and SEQ ID NO:2.

27. (Canceled):

28. (Canceled):

29. (Currently amended): A method for reducing the mobilization properties of plasmids residing within an *Enterobacteriaceae* strain comprising,

a) obtaining an *Enterobacteriaceae* progenitor strain from the genera of *Pantoea, Enterobacter, Erwinia* or *Gluconobacter*, which includes a cryptic plasmid having a nucleic acid sequence of at least 95% sequence identity with SEQ ID NO:1 ~~or~~ and SEQ ID NO:2 , and

b) eliminating the cryptic plasmid.

30. (Canceled):

31. (Previously added): The method according to claim 29, wherein the progenitor strain is capable of producing 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate from a carbon source.

32. (Previously added): The method according to claim 29, wherein the progenitor strain is a recombinant strain that comprises a heterologous nucleic acid sequence encoding a 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate reductase and is capable of converting 2,5-diketo-D-gluconate to 2-keto-L-gluconic acid.

33. (Currently amended): A method for obtaining an improved *Pantoea* strain comprising,

a) obtaining a *Pantoea* progenitor strain which includes a cryptic plasmid, said cryptic plasmid having a nucleic acid sequence with at least 90% sequence identity to SEQ ID NO:1 ~~or~~ and SEQ ID NO:2, and

b) eliminating the cryptic plasmid from the *Pantoea* strain thereby obtaining an improved *Pantoea* strain,

wherein the improved strain is able to grow at a higher temperature than the progenitor strain.

34. (Currently amended): The method according to claim 33, wherein the *Pantoea* progenitor strain is a *Pantoea citrea* strain.

35. (Currently amended): The method according to claim 33, wherein the *Pantoea* progenitor strain is a recombinant strain.

36. (Currently amended): The method according to claim 33, wherein the cryptic plasmid has a nucleic acid sequence with at least 95% sequence identity to SEQ ID NO:1 ~~or~~ and SEQ ID NO:2.

37. (Canceled):

38. (Canceled):

39. (New): The method according to claim 21, wherein said improved strain is a *Pantoea* strain.

40. (New): The method according to claim 33, wherein the cryptic plasmid has a nucleic acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:1 and SEQ ID NO:2.

41. (New): A method for obtaining an improved *Pantoea* strain comprising,

a) obtaining a *Pantoea* progenitor strain which includes a cryptic plasmid, said cryptic plasmid having a nucleic acid sequence which encodes a polypeptide having the sequence of SEQ ID NO: 3, and

b) eliminating the cryptic plasmid from the *Pantoea* progenitor strain thereby obtaining an improved *Pantoea* strain.

42. (New): The method according to claim 41, wherein the *Pantoea* progenitor strain is a *P. citrea* strain.

43. (New): The method according to claim 41, wherein the improved *Pantoea* strain is able to grow at a higher temperature than the progenitor strain.

44. (New): The method according to claim 41, wherein the cryptic plasmid has at least 95% sequence identity to the nucleic acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:1 and SEQ ID NO:2.